

# Horse and Pony Ireland

## Posture and Performance review

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Do you ever wonder why, no matter how hard you train, you and your horse aren't achieving the results you should be? Does your horse constantly suffer from niggling performance, lameness and flexibility problems?

If so *Posture and Performance* by well-known equestrian author Gillian Higgins could make a world of difference to you. As with anything, once you understand the problem you are half way to solving it.

Gillian, the driving force behind the *Horses Inside Out* equestrian education organisation is the author of the hugely successful titles *How Your Horse Moves* and *Horse Anatomy for Performance*.

Gillian's *Horses Inside Out* organisation offers a unique look the horse. Before each course Gillian spends 4 – 6 hours painting the inside of the horse on, the outside so that those attending the lecture have a deeper understanding of the mechanics of the horse. It is with this understanding that the rider can see the cause and effect of the horse's movement when combined with a rider is able to and take steps to ride and train their horse more efficiently.

The painted horse shows just what is going on under the saddle. This was, as Gillian says "A natural progression for me. I have always been arty and creative, I love horses and I have always been fascinated by anatomy. So *Horses Inside Out* is a combination of all my passions. On my travels as a therapist I realised many people could benefit from a better understanding of how horses work. So I started giving workshops for my clients where I indicated with a bit of paint where certain structures lay. Soon I realised I needed to paint the horse in advance of the demonstration. One demonstration led to another....."

Gillian finds her work very rewarding. "So often at demonstrations people will say to be 'oh that explains why...' It is very fulfilling and I love to think about all the horses I am helping."

Gillian's latest book, *Posture and Performance* is also based on the fundamental principles of *Horses Inside Out*. That is if riders understand the affect they have on the horse and what is going on beneath them when they are riding, they will be able to make adjustments, move forwards, become a better more effective rider and have a horse which is able to perform more proficiently and be less susceptible to injury.

This well written and easy to understand book is divided into two main parts: Part one discusses the Principles of Training which looks at the principles of anatomy, skeletal development and the effects of riding and asymmetry. Part two looks at Exercises for Performance with suggestions for improving the horse's outline, flexibility, core stability and musculoskeletal health thus reducing muscular and movement problems. The book is beautifully illustrated throughout with clear, easy to understand photographs.

Reading the book Gillian's incredible depth of knowledge of anatomy and the biomechanics of the horse and its relationship to riding and training shines through. Horse lovers will be utterly thrilled when they gain this understanding and can then begin to develop a systematic training regime which will actually work.

There is nothing more disheartening than to work a horse every day and for things to never improve, or for them to get worse. After reading this book you will have such an incredible understanding of what is happening and what problems are being created by factors that you possibly had never considered. With this book you will be even more amazed at how they manage to perform at all after all we put them through.

Gillian is based in South Nottinghamshire and competes with her own three horses:-Freddie the real star of *Horses Inside Out* is retired from competition. He evented up to Intermediate level coming first at Gatcombe International Horse trials Intermediate level in 2008. Furst Edition will compete at Elementary level this winter after a year off with tooth and sinus issues. Artistic Licence will start to event next season.

With Gillian's incredibly hectic schedule it is amazing that she found the time to write one book let alone three. As she says "There is no such thing as normal day for me. On the days I am not lecturing, giving demonstrations or touring I am seeing my personal clients. As a BHS senior coach and practising sports and remedial therapist for both horses and humans, I have a large portfolio of regulars. I also perform musculo-skeletal assessments for horse and rider. Other activities include riding and caring for my horses, the inevitable office work, planning talks and writing articles, answering emails and putting programmes together for future tours."

Like so many of us in the equestrian world Gillian is concerned that so many horses are being pushed into competition too early. *Posture and Performance* discusses the problems caused. Gillian is doing her level best to try to help riders understand what damage this causes "Many horses are pushed too hard too soon. I am doing as much as I can with regards to education. I believe the more enlightened people are about this the better horses will be in the long run.

Gillian is clearly has no love for gadgets designed either to speed up training or provide a quick fix for training issues. As she says "Gadgets or 'schooling aids' are no substitute for slow, sensitive and correct training. I think it is a really positive move that Switzerland has banned the use of draw reins at competitions."

Through her books, work and *Horses Inside Out* Gillian is making huge inroads into educating riders. In competition there is so much emphasis put on the horse being in the correct outline and yet so many riders have little idea of what this really means or how to achieve it. As Gillian explains, "The correct outline for each horse may vary slightly considering their anatomy, conformation, breed, strengths, weaknesses, injury history and needs. The most important consideration is to ensure the back is well supported especially when carrying the additional weight of a rider. In *Posture and Performance*, there is whole chapter on the anatomical effects of different outlines, the advantages and disadvantages to each." This is one of the main areas addressed by *Horses Inside Out* through demonstrations, courses, books and DVD's.

As a BHS senior coach Gillian believes position, balance and spatial awareness are important skills for any rider. These can be taught/learned or improved off the horse. Sessions on a riding simulator are invaluable for beginners (and also for advanced riders wishing to improve their position and performance). She continues, "I believe all learner riders should have a basic understanding of anatomy and biomechanics theory before starting to ride horses."

Gillian advises any rider to have regular sessions with a coach to check for asymmetry. In *Posture and Performance* there are a number of ideas for checking and improving asymmetry.

No horse or human is anatomically perfect so it is very important horses are seen regularly by good equine therapist, equine dentist, hoof care professional. This is also important for the rider as it follows that if you are asymmetrical your horse will have to work harder to correct the imbalance. Riders should arrange a visit to a physiotherapist or a specialist sports and remedial therapist. Even better, seek out a therapist who is qualified to look at horse and rider together.

Riding a horse is the most incredible gift; these generous, big hearted creatures really do their best for us, after reading this fabulous book there is no doubt that you will have the knowledge and insight to understand how the horse really works.

For more information about Gillian and her work visit [www.horsesinsideout.com](http://www.horsesinsideout.com)